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ABSTRACT

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the aristocratic, monarchical, and oligarchic societies of Europe were anathema. From the nineteenth century down to the present, a much larger percentage of the appropriate age population has attended secondary schools and institutions of higher education here than elsewhere. Most noteworthy of all has been the stress on equality of opportunity. The spread of the common school idea included a practice which would have far-reaching consequences. These schools, designed in part to Americanize the immigrant and to "civilize" the lower classes, knowingly set their educational sights at the levels of the culturally deprived. In a sense, they consciously lowered standards, or rather educational aspirations, from the levels upper-middle-class children could attain so as to make it possible for those of "deprived background" to catch up. By going slowly at the elementary and high school levels, the U.S. system permits many more to enter an institution of higher education. The gradual acceptance of the community's responsibility for upgrading the level of life of the underprivileged in America constitutes an important shift in our values. There is, however, a more fundamental change in the making, one that is implicit in the shift in emphasis from extending opportunity rights to the individual to extending them to the group. (Author/JM)

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# SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET

## OPPORTUNITY AND WELFARE IN THE FIRST NEW NATION

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## revolution · continuity · promise

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Delivered in
The Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village
in Dearborn, Michigan
on
May 16, 1974

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Some years ago I suggested that the United States should be properly regarded as the first new nation. The Declaration of Independence, whose bicentennial we are now celebrating, was the first successful proclamation by a major colony in modern times of its intent to secede from the mother country. It presaged comparable actions within half a century by most of the Spanish colonies in Central and South America. More recently, a variety of colonies in Africa and Asia have proclaimed their independence, often in words drawn directly from Thomas Jefferson's Declaration.

Born in a prolonged struggle for independence, the United States defined itself from its beginning in ideological terms. As many writers have noted, Americanism is an ideology, a set of integrated beliefs defining the good society. Some, such as Leon Samson and Sidney Hook, have even seen a close resemblance to those advocated by socialists. Thus in the 1930s Samson, seeking to explain "why no socialism in the U.S." argued that the basic reason was that the values of socialism and Americanism, *property relations apart*, were quite similar. To demonstrate the point, he quoted copiously, comparing the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin,

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This lecture leans heavily on my earlier related writings. See S. M. Lipset, *The First New Nation, The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967); *Group Life in America* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1972); and "Education and Equality: Israel and the United States Compared," *Society*, vol. 11 (March/April 1974), pp. 56-66.

and Stalin with those of leading American figures. Instead of citing such well-known advocates of the egalitarian ideal as Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, he took his representative citations from John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Mellon, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover. And as he indicated, their ideas of desirable goals in human relations—namely, equality of opportunity regardless of social origins and equal treatment regardless of social role—are much like those of the leading Marxists.[1]

Because equality and achievement have been linked throughout America's development as a nation, the concept of equality has had a special character. As David Potter stressed, "the American ideal and practice of equality . . . has implied for the individual . . . opportunity to make his own place in society and . . . emancipation from a system of status."[2] It must be emphasized that the American concept of equality, which focuses on opportunity and the quality of social relations, does not demand equality of income. This fact, Potter pointed out, is one reason why it is confusing to use the term "equality" to describe aspects of the American reality.

> [T]he connotations [of the term "equality"] to an American are quite unlike what they might be to a European. A European advocating equality might very well mean that all men should occupy positions that are roughly the same level in wealth, power, or enviability. But the American, with his emphasis upon equality of opportunity, has never conceived of it in this sense. He has traditionally expected to find a gamut ranging from rags to riches, from tramps to millionaires. . . . Thus equality did not mean uniform position on a common level, but it did mean universal opportunity to move through a scale which traversed many levels. . . . The emphasis upon unrestricted latitude as the essence of

[1] Leon Samson, *Towards a United Front* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1933), pp. 1-90; Sidney Hook, "The Philosophical Basis of Socialism in the United States," in D. D. Egbert and S. Persons, eds., *Socialism and American Life*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 450-451. For a condensation of Samson's analysis and recent discussions, see John Laslett and S. M. Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Garden City: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1974), pp. 426-462.

[2] David M. Potter, *People of Plenty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 91.

> equality in turn involved a heavy emphasis upon liberty as an essential means for keeping the scale open and hence making equality a reality as well as a theoretical condition. . . . As for social distinctions, certainly they exist; but whatever their power may be, social rank can seldom assert an open claim to deference in this country, and it usually makes at least a pretense of conformity to equalitarian ways.[3]

As Potter noted, European egalitarianism, largely Marxist, stresses the ultimate objective of equality of result—to be achieved, first, through state welfare policies that seek to raise the level of those at the bottom, a goal often supported by conservatives (whose links to aristocratic values tend to lead them to endorse welfare policies as an expression of *noblesse oblige*) and, second, through nationalization policies designed to reduce inequality of income and wealth.

The identification of Americanism with universalistic expressions of egalitarianism is typical of the way in which, ever since the beginning of the modern era, the revolutionary nationalism of new nations has tended to incorporate supranational ideals. As Karl Deutsch has put it:

> Behind the spreading of national consciousness there was at work perhaps a deeper change—a new *value* assigned to people *as they are*, or as they can become, with as much diversity of interlocking roles as will not destroy or stifle any of their personalities. After 1750 we find new and higher values assigned in certain advanced countries to children and women; to the poor and the sick; to slaves and peasants; to colored races and submerged nationalities. . . .
>
> National consciousness thus arises in an age that asserts birthrights for everybody, inborn, unalienable rights, first in the language of religion, then in the language of politics, and finally in terms involving economics and all society. . . .[4]

[3] Ibid., pp. 91-92, 96.

[4] Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: John Wiley, 1953), pp. 153-155. (Emphasis in original.)

When Americans celebrate their national heritage on Independence Day, Memorial Day, or other holidays of this sort, they dedicate themselves anew to a nation conceived as the living fulfillment of a political doctrine that enshrines a utopian concept of men's egalitarian and fraternal relations with one another. In linking national celebrations with political events and a political creed, the United States resembles other post-revolutionary societies like those of France, the Soviet Union, and many of the new states. In contrast, nations whose authority stems from traditional legitimacy tend to celebrate holidays linked with religious tradition or national military history.

In newly independent societies there has often been a transition from a system dominated by traditionalist, usually aristocratic, values to one characterized by egalitarian populist concepts. These new value systems are variously referred to as "liberal," "democratic," or "leftist" in contrast to "elitist," "conservative," or "aristocratic." The elitist ideology takes for granted the desirability of the hierarchical ordering of society in which those who belong to the "naturally superior" strata exercise due authority and are given generalized respect. Social recognition rests on the sum of all the qualities of a person's status rather than on a given role he may be playing. In colonial situations, the native elites derive their status, or are protected in it, by virtue of their connection with the status and power of the foreign ruler. With independence, the values of hierarchy, aristocracy, privilege, primogeniture, and (more recently) capitalism, all associated with the foreign imperialist power, are easily rejected.

Consequently, most struggles for independence have employed leftist ideologies, that of equality in revolutionary America, that of socialism in the contemporary new states. Man's status is to depend not upon inherited but upon achieved qualities. Hence the system must be geared to abolish all forms of ascriptive privilege and to reward achievement. The franchise is to be extended to everyone, the people being regarded as the source of power and authority; and various social reforms, such as economic development, the elimination of illiteracy, and the spread of education are to reduce inequalities in status. Thus, the need to legitimize the democratic goals of the American Revolution required a commitment to improve sharply the economic circumstances of the

mass of the population, even though the Revolution was conceived by many of its leaders as primarily a struggle for political independence. Every revolutionary group proclaims "*all* men to be equal" and to have "unalienable rights," or advocates a "classless society" and the elimination of minority rule in politics.

However, beneath this consistency of radical temper, there are profound differences in the ways in which various parties or strata interpret their revolutionary commitments. In the United States after the adoption of the Constitution, the conservative groups who had taken part in the anti-imperialist revolution continued to play a major, even dominant, role. The Federalists, though convinced advocates of views which were radical and republican by European standards, sought to limit the application of egalitarian principles in such fields as property relations, religion, and the suffrage. Yet, as in most contemporary new states in which conservatives have tried to defend traditionalist values after independence, the more conservative party soon lost office. The Federalists had failed in their efforts to sustain a party which defended aspects of inequality, and their successors sought to learn from their errors.[5] When conservatism revived as a political force in the form of Whig opposition to Andrew Jackson, it had a distinctly new look. In attacking Jackson, the tribune of the plebians, the new conservatives labeled him royalist and Tory, calling him "King Andrew," while they took for themselves the term Whig, the title of the opposition to Toryism and royal absolutism in Britain.

The supremacy of egalitarian values in politics is reflected in the Whigs' behavior in the presidential elections of 1840, incidentally the first such contest the Whigs were able to win:

> Harrison and Tyler were selected as the party candidates. . . . Webster was rejected on . . . [the] ground he was "aristocratic." This consideration showed how completely the old order had changed. The men of wealth well realized, now that liberty and equality had shown their power, that in enthusiastic profession of fraternity lay their only course of safety. Property rights were secure only when it was realized that in America property was

[5] Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 117-119.

> honestly accessible to talent, however humble in its early circumstances. The Whigs found it useful to disavow as vehemently as they could any and all pretensions to a caste superiority in political life. . . .[6]

And in presenting their candidate for governor that year, the New York Whig convention described him as "a true and worthy representative of Democrat-Republican principles, born in the forest of the noble Western region of our own State, trained among an industrious kindred to hardy toil and manual labor on the farm and in the manufactory—democratic in all his associations and sympathies. . . ."[7] Actually, many of the candidates in the Whig party were "gentlemen," men from some of the country's first families.[8] But in keeping with the democratic spirit of the times, they campaigned on a ticket of fraternity and equality, even appealing to class hatred against the elite.

It is important to place these events and doctrines in their historical context. During the first half of the nineteenth century American conservatives had come to recognize that, like it or not, they were operating in a society in which egalitarian values were dominant and in which the rights of the people to govern and of the able to succeed had to be accepted as inviolable. But the important fact is that, for both Democrats and Whigs, the aristocratic, monarchical, and oligarchic societies of Europe were anathema. Just as political parties in the new states of today are almost automatically "socialist," so American political leaders in the first half-century of our existence were instinctively "democrats." The latter believed that the United States had a special mission to perform in introducing a new social and political order to the world, and some even felt that it had a duty to give moral, financial, and other forms of support to European radicals fighting for republicanism and freedom.[9]

[6] Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), pp. 411-413.

[7] Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 251.

[8] Carl R. Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man 1830-1850* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 165.

[9] See Merle Curti, "Young America," in *Probing Our Past* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), pp. 219-245.

The significance of "leftism" as characterizing the core values in the American political tradition may be best perceived from the vantage point of comparative North American history—that is, from the contrast between Canada and the United States. American historians and political philosophers may debate how radical, liberal, leftist, or even conservative American politics has been, but there is no doubt in the mind of Canadian historians. They see their nation as a descendant of counterrevolution and the United States as a product of revolution. Once the die was cast, consisting of a triumphant revolution in the thirteen colonies and a failure to the north, an institutional framework was set. Consequent events tended to enforce "leftist" strength south of the border and a "rightist" bias to the north. The success of the revolutionary ideology, the defeat of the Tories, and the emigration of many of them north to Canada or across the ocean to Britain all served to enhance the strength of the forces favoring egalitarian democratic principles in the new nation and to weaken conservative tendencies. On the other hand, Canada's failure to have a revolution of its own, the immigration of conservative elements and the emigration of radical elements, and the success of colonial Toryism in erecting a conservative class structure—all these contributed to making Canada a more conservative and rigidly stratified society.[10]

# II

Much of the social history of the United States, then, may be read in terms of an attempt to elaborate on the egalitarian promise of the Declaration of Independence. The United States led other nations in expanding its suffrage to cover all white males (slavery was its great exception and horror, and continued racism its Achilles' heel). It also led in providing education to its inhabitants. The census of 1840 indicated that over 90 percent of whites were literate. The figure was undoubtedly an exaggeration. Yet, then and later, this country

[10] For an elaboration, see my book, *Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), pp. 37-75.

spent a greater share of public funds on education than other societies. From the nineteenth century down to the present, a much larger percentage of the appropriate age population has attended secondary schools and institutions of higher education here than elsewhere. In other words, education has been more equally distributed in the United States than in other countries for a century and a half. Further, a myriad of foreign observers—Tocqueville, Martineau and Bryce among them—have commented on the emphasis in social relations on symbolic equality. They have noted that, in effect, no man need doff his cap to another, that the symbols of rank so prevalent in Europe have been absent here. Populism and anti-elitism have characterized America's political style.

Most noteworthy of all in the American concept of equality, as we have seen, has been the stress on equality—not equality of rank, status, income or wealth, but equality of opportunity. In the main, the American ideal has been one of open social mobility, everyone starting at the same point in a race for success.[11]

The vigor of this doctrine in early America may be seen in its most extreme form in the program of the Workingmen's parties formed in various East Coast cities in the 1820s and 1830s.[12] These parties, which secured as much as 20 percent of the urban vote, were particularly concerned with education. In a profound document written in 1829, the New York party anticipated the conclusions of a much later report by James Coleman by asserting that access to equal education in day schools was far from sufficient to provide equal opportunity in the race for success.[13] For, they said, a few hours in school cannot counter the highly unequal effects of varying cultural and material environments supplied by families

[11] For a general discussion of current evidence on the subject in a comparative context, see S. M. Lipset, "Social Mobility and Equal Opportunity," *The Public Interest*, no. 29 (Fall 1972), pp. 90-108.

[12] See Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class. A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement 1829-1837* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians. The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967), esp. pp. 9-33.

[13] New York Workingmen's Party, "A System of Republican Education," in Walter Hugins, ed., *The Reform Impulse 1825-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 135-139.

of unequal wealth and culture. To ensure that all had the same environment twenty-four hours a day, they proposed that all children, regardless of class background or parental wishes, be educated from six years of age on in boarding schools. Clearly, this American political party made the most radical proposal of all—to nationalize not property but children. Not surprisingly, the proposal was unpopular and never came close to carrying, but the fact that a party which was contending for public office and electing representatives to various legislative bodies would even make it indicates the strength of egalitarianism a half-century following American independence.

It is noteworthy that this party, which incidentally gave Karl Marx the idea that the working class could and should organize politically on its own behalf, did not call for equality of wealth or income. This was never the meaning of equality in Americanism. The Workingmen of 1830 accepted inequality as long as it was the result of success in a competitive race for the top. Close to a century later, a highly successful American multimillionaire, Andrew Carnegie, advocated a confiscatory inheritance tax that would have returned all wealth to the state upon death. Carnegie also believed that new ways should be found to equalize the race for success.

Although the Workingmen's parties did not get their boarding schools, the idea that all should begin with an equal education helped strengthen the more successful efforts of those who, like Horace Mann, urged the creation of publicly supported "common" schools in the 1840s. By common schools was meant what are now called "integrated" schools—that is, schools attended by children from diverse social backgrounds, natives and immigrants, rich and poor. The proponents assumed that such schools were necessary to develop a common culture, to absorb those from varying backgrounds, to make possible more equality of opportunity, as well as to create the kind of citizenry that could participate in a one-man, one-vote democracy.[14]

[14] Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Genius of American Education* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965), pp. 63-71; Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School. Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1957), see esp. pp. 9-15, 84-97, 101-112.

The spread of the common school idea, it should be noted, included a practice which would have far-reaching consequences. These schools, designed in part to Americanize the immigrant and to "civilize" the lower classes, deliberately set their educational sights at the levels of the culturally deprived. In a sense they consciously lowered standards, or rather educational aspirations, from the levels upper-middle-class children could attain so as to make it possible for those of "deprived background" to catch up. It was assumed that all would eventually reach higher levels of attainment and knowledge in the upper grades and ultimately in college and university. This pattern has continued. Worldwide comparisons show that American youths study less than their equivalents in upper-level European gymnasia or lycées. As Max Weber noted in 1918, "The American boy learns unspeakably less than the German boy."[15] By age twenty, however, the Americans have more than caught up. And a much greater percentage of them than in any European country secures a higher education. By going slowly at the elementary and high school levels, the U.S. system permits many more to enter an institution of higher education and to graduate.

## III

It would be misleading to credit the growth of education and other institutional practices fostering social mobility solely or primarily to forces stemming from egalitarian political ideology. The ideology itself, the educational growth, and egalitarian social relations were fostered as well by the fact that so much of America was a rapidly expanding "new society," a frontier culture in which all families were first settlers, or their immediate descendants. More important, perhaps, may have been the impact of religion. The United States was and remains the only country in which the majority adheres to Protestant *sects*, mainly Baptist and Methodist, rather than to religions which had been state churches in Europe, such as Catholic, Lutheran,

[15] H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 149.

Anglican, and Greek Orthodox. The latter were hierarchically organized and were linked to monarchy and aristocracy, so that part of the alliance between throne and altar also served to mediate between man and God.

The Protestant sects, on the other hand, insist that man deal directly with God, that he follow his conscience rather than obey the church or state and that, to be qualified to do so, he must be literate, a student of the Bible. Therefore, they supported the spread of public education and the growth of universities, starting many colleges and universities themselves. The Protestant Ethic, of course, also contributed directly to mobility and economic growth by its emphasis on hard work. It also favored a political orientation which had the state helping the individual to help himself—through education, but not through collectivist welfare measures.

In spite of its emphasis on equality of opportunity, the United States has never really approached the ideal, even in the spread of formal education. Two great nineteenth-century radical thinkers, Karl Marx and Henry George (the single-tax theorist), independently pointed out that publicly supported higher education in the United States involved taking money from the poor to subsidize the education of the well-to-do, that it amounted to a negative "transfer payment" so to speak. Henry George put the thesis in colorful terms when he said in the 1890s that the University of California is a place to which the poor send the children of the rich. Recent analyses by economists indicate George is still right.[16] In spite of the enormous spread of state higher education in California—over 50 percent of the college age population is in school in that state—the families of those who attend the University of California have a higher income than those who go to the state colleges or junior colleges, who in turn are more affluent than the families whose children do not go on to higher education.

[16] See W. L. Hansen and B. Weisbrod, "The Distribution of Costs and Direct Benefits of Public Education: The Case of California," *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 4 (Spring 1969), pp. 178-179, 181-182, 185. For a general discussion of this point see Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1968), pp. 276-279; and Irving Kristol, *Democratic Idea in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 122.

College and university attendance, which has now reached close to 50 percent of the relevant age group nationally, still varies greatly with family income. In 1967, 87 percent of those youths whose families earned $15,000 or more attended college, whereas only 20 percent of those from families with incomes below $3,000 a year did so. Yet this 20 percent figure for the very poor is higher than the total figure for total college attendance in many European countries.

It should be obvious, however, that the diffusion of college education and even the broadening of the social class background of those who hold privileged positions do not demonstrate a leveling of income, wealth or power in America or elsewhere. Jencks has properly emphasized that in spite of the growth of higher education, the distribution of wealth has not narrowed in the United States in recent decades.[17] The evidence does suggest that wealth distribution is much more egalitarian today than in pre-Civil War days, and that there was a narrowing of the gap between the poor and the upper strata in the period of the Depression and New Deal.[18] But the sharply stratified distribution wherein the lowest quartile holds about 5 percent of the wealth and the highest tenth well over a third still continues. Raymond Boudon, the French sociologist, drawing on data from Western Europe and North America, has in fact shown that increases in education have the effect of widening the salary gap from top to bottom.[19]

Sharp inequality continues to characterize American society, as it does all other complex social systems. Well-to-do parents are more able than poor parents to provide their offspring with an academically stimulating environment, good schools and teachers, the motivation to attain success, and the contacts and financial aid so useful in getting started in the race for success. Moreover, those who control large financial resources may convert these into

[17] Christopher Jencks et al., *Inequality* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973).

[18] For a detailed analysis of inequality in earlier days, see Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath Co., 1973).

[19] Raymond Boudon, *Education, Opportunity and Social Mobility* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974), pp. 187-188.

various forms of power for affecting key decisions in the society—as, in a different way, may those at the summit of intellectually important and opinion-molding institutions. Race, ethnic and class background may be less of a handicap in the race for success than earlier, but the inequality between those who succeed and those who fail has not been reduced.

It should be noted that the fight for more equality, legitimized by the historic commitment to the ideal, is still waged in terms of the old American emphasis on equality of opportunity, the demand of the Workingmen's party that social origin not be a handicap in the race for success. Almost none of the battles, however, are concerned directly with equality as such. That is, blacks and women are demanding their appropriate share of corporation presidencies, university professorships, government positions, and so forth, but they are not arguing that the perquisites associated with these statuses be lowered or eliminated. Even the "war on poverty" of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson was presented basically as an extension of equal opportunity.

The social democratic states of Scandinavia, Britain, Germany and Israel have attempted to implement the ideal of the welfare state—to improve the lot of the less fortunate and to insure against the insecurities of employment, health, and old age. Until recently, however, they paid little attention to opening the door of opportunity. All of them have maintained a two-class educational system, the system rejected by Horace Mann and other American pre-Civil War reformers in which a small minority, largely of privileged origins, attends the educationally superior high schools, the lycées, gymnasia, public (private) and grammar schools leading to matriculation in universities, while the large majority attends vocational schools. Social democracy has spent its money disproportionately on social welfare, old-age pensions, state medicine, unemployment benefits, public housing, et cetera. The United States, in contrast, has devoted more of its resources to education as the road to success. These differences, while still existent, have narrowed considerably. The United States is increasingly a welfare state, whereas in recent decades the social democracies of Europe have been consciously modifying their educational systems in the direction of comprehensive, common or integrated schools.

As the social democratic states move in the American direction in their educational system, as they become concerned with equality of opportunity, this country has begun to move away from its emphasis on individual rights and opportunities to a concern for welfare and for group rights. To some extent, the U.S. trend reflects the fact that, the condition of minorities apart, equality of opportunity has become a reality for white males. The two most recent comprehensive statistical studies of the situation, those of Blau and Duncan on the one hand, and of Jencks and his associates on the other, both emphasize this development.[20]

The United States is gradually becoming committed to guaranteeing group rights to equality of status, as distinct from its traditional focus on equality of opportunity. This may be seen in its most controversial and questionable form in the efforts to establish quotas—racial, ethnic and biological—as a way of measuring concern for equality. But it has been evident for a much longer time in the steady growth in welfare expenditures, under Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

The welfare state, despite its growth, does not appear to have fulfilled the objectives set for it. The provision of more monies has not reduced the size of the slums, or the assorted other social morbidities associated with low income. Currently, a major source of the difficulties in metropolitan areas is the enormous cost and the high social morbidity rate involved in absorbing the growing number of people who have moved to the cities, in part to take advantage of economic opportunity and of higher standards of welfare support. To a considerable degree, the breakdown of urban services in many communities is a consequence of having to pay for welfare. Yet such payments have had little positive effect on the lives of welfare recipients. There is good reason to believe that, in the absence of jobs, migrants from rural and depressed regions to the cities would have been better off had they remained in the cultural surroundings to which they were accustomed.

Spokesmen for both major parties are currently advocating similar solutions to the problem. The Nixon administration's Family Assistance Plan and the bills proposed by some Democrats

[20] Peter Blau and O. Dudley Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1962), and Jencks et al., *Inequality*.

have differed mainly in mechanics and in the amount of monies to be allocated immediately. Both parties favor federalization of welfare, and both seek to ease the cities' tax burdens, to reduce the size of the bureaucracy administering welfare, and hopefully, through direct payments incorporating financial incentives, to encourage the poor to seek income in the labor market. And in the related field of medical care, both are committed to a state-financed (and state-controlled) system. The arguments between administration spokesmen and liberal Democrats now revolve around the relative advantages of "fee for service" and prepayment systems, much like the medical care debates in social democratic Europe.

Leading Republicans now assert that "there is much in the new doctrine of equality of results that is solid"—to use the words of Paul McCracken, member of President Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisers in 1956-59 and chairman of the same body for President Nixon from 1969-72. McCracken, speaking to the Business Council, noted that American society is concerned with finding an optimum balance between its traditional ideal of equality of opportunity and its growing commitment to greater equality of result.

> For economic policy we need to have a more explicit and coherent income maintenance policy. Powerful intellectual impetus for this, as for so much of the current economic policy landscape, came from Milton Friedman in his writings on the negative income tax. It was given programmatic expression four years ago in the President's Family Assistance Plan. Ours is now a rich economy, and we can well afford it. And all of us here would have to admit that there is a substantial element of random luck in success. . . . Moreover, we need a more explicit and coherent income sharing plan to win more leeway for using the pricing system. . . .
>
> The optimum toward which society is trying to feel its way here will be neither pure "equality of results" nor just "equality of opportunity." A society organized solely on the principle of equality of opportunity is not acceptable, and one organized solely around the

principle of equality of results would not be operational.[21]

The gradual acceptance of the community's responsibility for upgrading the level of life of the underprivileged in America constitutes an important shift in our values away from the primary, almost sole, focus on opportunity implied in the original achievement and Protestant orientations of the early republic. Yet, it may be argued that the initial emphasis on equality derived from the Declaration of Independence, which has led many Americans to speak of their country as a "classless society," serves to strengthen the new trend towards using government power to eliminate "poverty," now that that concern has reached the political arena. For many, as noted earlier, the policies of the "war on poverty" are seen as the current manifestation of the revolutionary struggle to guarantee equal access to the top for all.

# IV

There is, however, a more fundamental change in the making, one that is implicit in the shift in emphasis from extending opportunity rights to the individual to extending them to the group. I would like to devote some time now to the problems posed by this change.

The change has found its most concrete expression in proposals for guaranteed quotas in jobs and school placement. Quotas produce a clear conflict of interest between the underprivileged who demand them and those who have found opportunity and success by traditionally competitive methods, and there is no easy or obvious way to resolve this conflict. As Blau and Duncan as well as Jencks have demonstrated, the argument that different ethnic groups have found ways and means to attain status, power, and economic reward holds for almost all American white male groups, but not for blacks or women. Many recognize that a pure quota system humiliates the recipients of such preferment and

[21] Paul W. McCracken, "The New Equality," *Michigan Business Review* (March 1974), pp. 2-7.

is a danger to society in that it may permit unqualified persons to hold jobs. During the 1960s, public policy increasingly took note of the dilemma and tried to resolve it by various forms of affirmative action.

The policy of affirmative action was first proclaimed by President Johnson in a 1965 executive order. In defending and explaining this policy, the image of the shackled runner was widely used:

> Imagine a hundred yard dash in which one of the two runners has his legs shackled together. He has progressed ten yards, while the unshackled runner has gone fifty yards. At that point the judges decide that the race is unfair. How do they rectify the situation? Do they merely remove the shackles and allow the race to proceed? Then they could say that "equal opportunity" now prevailed. But one of the runners would still be forty yards ahead of the other. Would it not be the better part of justice to allow the previously shackled runner to make up the forty yard gap: or to start the race all over again? That would be affirmative action towards equality.[22]

The image is a fitting one for the black man in America. Even if discrimination were eliminated, he would still be at a disadvantage, for the ability to compete in American society is tied to a less visible chain of prior factors: the work experience of family and friends, as well as educational achievement, which are themselves linked to the educational and cultural experience of family. For these reasons, the economic advancement of emerging groups in America has always taken place over a span of generations. But the oppression of the American black man has been imposed by *this* society, not by another one, as was the case with most other emerging ethnic groups in America. Does this not impose a special national responsibility for affirmative action?

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[22] Earl Raab, "Quotas by Any Other Name," *Commentary*, vol. 53 (January 1972), p. 41. See also Daniel Bell, *Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 416-417.

The need for affirmative action is strongly supported by various studies which indicate that, although the aspirations of black students tend to be as high as those of whites, their expectations are quite low. Many see their chances for success as very small, regardless of how well they do in school or elsewhere. This clearly has had negative effects on the ability of black children to study hard and learn, and of black adults to work well and persistently.

Beyond these cultural handicaps, however, has been the fact that American society discriminated against blacks, even when they were qualified. Many major institutions in both the North and the South either barred their entry or limited their numbers to a token quota. The segregated schools of the period before the 1954 *Brown* decision were *not* separate but equal. They were separate and unequal. And limitations on black suffrage in the South, where most blacks lived, meant that they could not effectively resort to the classic democratic political remedy for maltreatment.

Not surprisingly, black leaders turned to their only effective weapon, civil disobedience, in an attempt to embarrass authority into acting on their behalf. The first such effort in modern times, the March on Washington Movement of Warld War II led by A. Philip Randolph, forced Franklin Roosevelt to establish a Fair Employment Practices Commission. But the provision of a mechanism through which minority group members could appeal against apparent overt discrimination, for example, the hiring of a less qualified white for a job, proved ineffective. There were not enough minority group members who had both the skills and the political-legal know-how to benefit from these new legal rights. This failure led naturally to the demand for government programs to increase the pool of trained minority manpower. Perhaps as important, immediately, has been the effort to eliminate the excessive job requirements that handicapped those whose cultural background is not middle class—requirements such as more education than the job in fact requires or tests whose content is largely irrelevant to the position in question. These changes have had one purpose in common—to give minority group members a better chance in the competition for jobs. This has also been the purpose of various compensatory education programs, as well as of the

efforts of different agencies to find qualified minority members who, left to themselves, might not search out available positions.

Such efforts have an important historic precedent which has never been questioned—veterans' preference, that is, compensation for a competitive disability imposed by society. In accordance with this principle, veterans have traditionally been given preferential treatment by governmental agencies and some private employers when their qualifications were demonstrated to be roughly equal to that of other applicants. The stress on affirmative action, however, changed gradually to a demand for specific group quotas for admission to assorted institutions and jobs, and beyond this, in the New York and San Francisco school systems, among many, to proposals requiring the dismissal of qualified teachers and administrators.

This change in the concept of equal opportunity from a focus on the rights of *individuals* to those of *groups*, as measured by the positions achieved, has marked an extraordinary shift in the concept of civil rights in America. Historically, minority groups that have suffered discrimination, institutionalized prejudice, or handicaps with respect to skills and education have demanded the elimination of barriers denying *individuals* access to opportunity. Jews, Orientals, and Italians objected to the *numerous clausus* established by institutions of higher learning and other organizations against qualified members of their ethnic groups. They opposed policies designed to perpetuate the advantages enjoyed by members of majority groups. Except for Catholic proposals for state support of parochial schools, which were almost invariably rejected as "un-American," no minority group had until recently demanded significant special-group advantages.

Liberal opinion had always assumed that the egalitarian creed meant advocacy of a universalistic rule of meritocracy, enabling all to secure positions for which they qualified in open, fair competition. Felix Frankfurter, who entered Harvard Law School before World War I as an immigrant Jewish graduate of CCNY, never lost his awe of the meritocratic system: "What mattered was excellence in your profession to which your father or your race was equally irrelevant. And so rich man, poor man were just irrelevant titles to the equation of human relations. The

thing that mattered was what you did professionally."[23] Randolph Bourne, the most creative and celebrated of the young Socialist intellectuals of that period and a man who was concerned with the situation of the poverty-stricken Jews of New York's Lower East Side, also emphasized that an individual must be judged by what he could do, not by his ethnic or class background.[24]

This traditional liberal-left position, implicit in the American creed's emphasis on equality of opportunity, broke down with the demand of blacks for "equality of results"—which meant special group advantage in the form of quotas to increase their number in university admissions, various occupations, and trade unions (which control access to jobs) to their proportion in the population. And, as the political community has come to accept this principle, other disadvantaged groups—Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, women—have, not unnaturally, taken up and secured the same demands for *group* rather than *individual* rights and for *group* mobility, as a way of bypassing the historic process of upward mobility of the individual through the acquisition of skills.

Compliance with demands for special quotas means denial to others of positions for which they are qualified, or which they now have. It means that other minority groups which have been particularly successful in certain fields are now being asked to give up their gains. This is true of such groups as the Jews, the Japanese, and the Chinese that have concentrated on education as a means of mobility. The civil service, more universalistic than other job markets, has always been a special arena for mobility for disadvantaged groups doing well in school and in examinations. Other immigrant minority groups have used different skills, which they brought from Europe, to gain a special advantage in different job markets. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of America's ethnic groups, it is not surprising that their occupational distribution also varies.

If the concept of positive group discrimination is accepted, as it has begun to be, America will have accepted a version of the

[23] Felix Frankfurter, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces* (Garden City: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1962), p. 43.

[24] Randolph S. Bourne, *Youth and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), p. 318.

principle of *ascription*, or hereditary placement, to advance equal opportunity.[25] The implications of this change in American values, a change from achievement to ascription, have been eloquently stated by Earl Raab:

> One of the marks of the free society is the ascendance of performance over ancestry—or, to put it more comprehensively, the ascendance of achieved status over ascribed status. Aristocracies and racist societies confer status on the basis of heredity. A democratic society begins with the cutting of the ancestral cord. This by itself does not yet make a humanistic society or even a properly democratic one. There is, for example, the not inconsiderable question of distributive justice in rewarding performance. But achieved versus ascribed status is *one* inexorable dividing line between a democratic and an undemocratic society. This is the aspect of democracy which represents the primacy of the individual, and of individual freedom. It has to do with the belief that an individual exists not just to serve a social function, but to stretch his unique spirit and capacities for their own sake: "the right of every man not to have but to be his best." In that sense, it could be said that a principle of ascribed equality—a kind of perverse hereditary theory—would be as insidiously destructive of the individual and of individual freedom as a principle of ascribed inequality.[26]

It may appear that the argument against special prescriptive quotas for minority groups is a form of special pleading by spokesmen of the privileged elements in society. That this is so, when viewed from a pure interest group standpoint, cannot be denied. Yet, persuasive voices against quotas have been heard from the black community. Orlando Patterson, the black sociologist, argues that the black American has a stake in a "conception of human dignity in which every individual is, and ought to be, responsible

[25] It is noteworthy that under the Nixon administration, officials have pressed more vigorously for quotas, described as "targets," than under the Johnson administration.

[26] Raab, "Quotas by Any Other Name," p. 42; Bell, *Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, pp. 418-419.

for himself and his actions." In his opinion, for blacks to insist that they, unlike other groups, lack the ability to change their circumstances because of their social environment is to accept a demoralizing view of their situation, one which serves to discourage efforts to change it. He notes that the emphasis on the socially determined sources of black social inferiority is so strong that the issue for many is not "why the group fails, but why the miracle of occasional individual successes persists among them." For him, the great need is for blacks to find ways of emphasizing personal autonomy. And in trying to do this, they should lay stress upon, and find hope and pride in, "the not inconsiderable number of successful Blacks." He calls attention to the

> numerous cases of black men and women on the average no better endowed genetically than fellow Blacks they have left behind in the ghettos, and coming from environments with the same sorry list of broken homes, crime-plagued neighborhoods, drug-infested streets, inadequate schools, and racist white authority figures, who nonetheless succeed. How are we to explain them? We cannot. They defy explanation precisely because they alone account for their success; they made their success, and they made it, first, through a rebellion against their deterministic moral environment, and then, having gained their humanity, through the much easier rebellion against their social and economic environment.

He concludes that such behavior can only come about "when one accepts one's total responsibility for oneself and one's future."[27]

Black economist Thomas Sowell points to the demoralizing consequences of emphasis on quotas for students and faculty. He suggests that the effort of universities to fill such quotas has meant that large numbers of black students are enrolled in schools for which they are ill-prepared. Thus when the most scholarly, prestigious, and selective universities admit black students who are less prepared than the whites, they set up a situation in which the blacks can only feel inadequate. He describes the problem

[27] Orlando Patterson, "The Moral Crisis of the Black American," *The Public Interest*, vol. 32 (Summer 1973), pp. 43-69, esp. pp. 64-65.

caused by the admission policies of the elite white institutions this way:

> When black students who would normally qualify for a state college are drained away by Ivy League colleges and universities, then state colleges have little choice but to recruit black students who would normally qualify for still lower level institutions—and so the process continues down the line. The net result is that, in a country with 3,000 widely differing colleges and universities capable of accommodating every conceivable level of educational preparation and intellectual development, there is a widespread problem of "underprepared" black students at many institutional levels, even though black students' capabilities span the whole range by any standard used. The problem is not one of absolute ability level, but rather of widespread mismatching of individuals with institutions. The problem is seldom seen for what it is, for it has *not* been approached in terms of the optimum distribution of black students in the light of their preparation and interests, but rather in terms of how Harvard, Berkeley, or Antioch can do its part, maintain its leadership, or fill its quota. The schools which have most rapidly increased their enrollments of black students are those where the great majority of white American students could not qualify. However, since such schools typically do not admit underqualified white students, they have no "white problem" corresponding to the problem posed for them by underqualified black students. This problem must also be seen in perspective: the College Board scores and other academic indicators for black students in prestige colleges and universities are typically *above the national average* for white Americans. Special tutoring, reduced course loads, and other special accommodations and expedients for minority students are necessitated by programs geared to a student body which is not only above the national average but in the top *1 or 2 percent* of all American students. The problem created by black students who do not meet the usual

> institutional standards may be grim or even desperate for both the students and the institution. Yet it does not arise because students are incapable of absorbing a college education. They may be incapable of absorbing an M.I.T. education, but so is virtually everyone else. . . .
>
> [B]lacks at all levels of ability are systematically mismatched upward, so that good students go where outstanding students should be going and outstanding students go where only a handful of peak performers can survive. The net effect of this "pervasive shifting effect" is to place students where they do not learn as much as they would in schools geared to students of their own educational preparation.[28]

A comparable problem has been created by the efforts of universities to fill faculty quotas, according to Sowell. As is obvious from the statistics, the past record of inferior education for blacks means that black America

> has included very few persons trained to be academic scholars. Moreover, many years of academic education are required for anyone, regardless of race, to qualify, even minimally, as a faculty member, much less as a mature scholar. In short, there are relatively few black scholars in existence, and the number cannot be greatly increased in the immediate future. And it is in this context that faculty quotas must be considered. Any "goal," "target," or "affirmative action" designed to make the percentage of blacks on faculties approximate that in the general population can only mean reducing quality standards.[29]

And this creates a situation in which black faculty are identified with "substandard" teachers, a phenomenon which can only create demoralizing stereotypes among both black and white students.

Thus, emphasis on the need for special help to blacks and some other minorities produces more serious negative conse-

[28] Thomas Sowell, "The Plight of the Black Students in the United States," *Daedalus*, vol. 103 (Spring 1974), pp. 179-181.

[29] Ibid., p. 185.

quences than its impact on the traditional American faith in achievement. As noted, it implies that there is something seriously wrong with blacks, that equality of opportunity is not enough for them. Moreover, the very pressure on blacks to achieve more rapidly in one decade or one generation than previous groups, pressure which puts some of them into situations for which they are not prepared, helps to convince whites and blacks alike that the latter constitute a more difficult problem than other ethnic groups. In many ways, the blacks' failures in such circumstances facilitate racist attitudes among whites and feelings of inferiority and self-hatred among blacks.

But the facts about black progress in the decade of the 1960s alone should serve to counter such pessimism—and counter as well the insistence that blacks require an inordinate level of preference because there is no way they can make it on their own. As is made clear by abundant census data, a recent national survey conducted for CBS, and assorted market research studies conducted for *Ebony* magazine, there has been an enormous increase in the size of the black middle class judged in occupational and income terms; and, equally important for the future, the number graduating from high school and entering colleges has grown to the point where the population of the relevant black age group achieving such educational levels is close to that for whites.[30]

This latter statistic is extremely important, even though it conceals the fact that the schools and colleges which black youth attend are, on the average, inferior educationally to those attended by whites. Formal levels of education are crucial to establishing credentials in American society. Hence, the approach of black youths to equality in this regard should have considerable implications for their occupational achievements.

To really judge the rate of black progress, therefore, it is necessary to concentrate on the young—for older blacks who are much less educated and skilled than the comparable age cohort among whites are unable to catch up. The younger a given cohort, the smaller the educational gap between whites and blacks and

[30] See especially, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States 1972*, Current Population Reports, series P-23, no. 46 (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1973), pp. 21, 22, 49 and 62.

the lower the income difference: "In 1972 the average income of black families with male heads between the ages of 25 and 34 was 80 percent of white families in the comparable age group. But the 35 to 44-year-age-group earned 71 percent of white counterparts and 55 to 64 years olds earned only 58 percent."[31] Thus as the educational level of young blacks increases and as the younger blacks become older, the income differential should continue to decline.

In evaluating black progress in the occupational structure during the 1960s, it is important to recognize that this occurred in a period of largely full employment and economic growth. The records of blacks and of other minority ethnic groups are similar in that prospects for large-scale upward mobility are linked to economic expansion and prosperity. Such periods also have been characterized by emphasis on achievement and meritocracy in the larger political and cultural climate.

The position of the black in American society has constituted the great challenge to the American revolutionary dream since the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson, that document's principal author, voiced his concerns in 1781, even before the revolutionary war was over, stating with more prescience than even he probably realized: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."[32] Jefferson's country is still paying part of the price he foresaw. It is impossible to envision an America at peace with itself in which a sizable number of its citizens remain outside the mainstream of national life and abundance because their ancestors were dragooned here from Africa to serve as an underclass for the white population. There is no price that we can be called on to pay to remedy that situation that can be considered too costly, except one: the price that humiliates the black population in the context of seemingly trying to help it. Orlando Patterson notes that what blacks, like all Americans, require is "an achievement of the positive side of rebellion, the affirmation of true dignity in the unaided 'drive to

[31] Thomas R. Roth, "The Changing Profile of Black Workers," *The American Federationist* (April 1974), p. 2.

[32] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: R. T. Rawle, 1801), p. 321.

touch, to build,'"[33] As they accomplish this objective, they reaffirm that the American Revolution is still an ongoing, living reality.

America moves into its third century as an independent state still searching for answers to the age-old problem of how people of diverse cultural, religious, racial, and economic backgrounds can live together. Troubled times have turned many inward: they seek a sense of belonging to an entity that is smaller than the nation. Ethnicity seemingly has become a source of stability for the larger society. Yet it is important to recognize that a free society must respect the primacy of the individual. Although politics and collective bargaining can work only through the conflicts and alliances of diverse groups, the outcome of such conflicts, particularly as they are resolved by government, must be to guarantee and enhance the equality and rights of the individual. Whether a group, ethnic or other, preserves and extends itself must be the voluntary action of its members, never the action of the larger society.

[33] Patterson, "The Moral Crisis of the Black American," p. 65.

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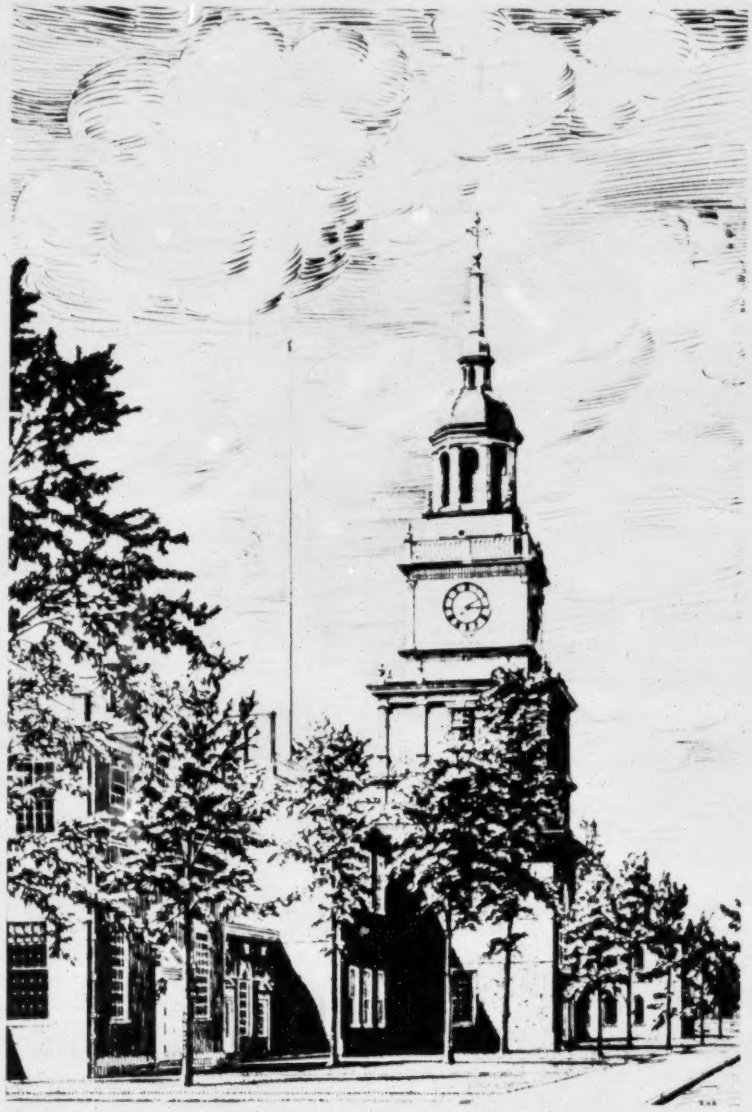

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